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THE FAN



Sea Nymphs, Italian, 1760.

IS not the fan one of the chief weapons in the armoury of the Love-God? Is it not the rampart from behind which the fiercest fire of love's artillery is directed? Nay, is it not in very truth the sceptre of the Love-God? Did not the Greeks early recognize this fact by placing the plumed fan in the hands of Eros himself? These queries are put by G. Woolliscroft Rhead, an authority on the fan and its history, and who concludes that the fan is at once the creation of Amor and the chief ensign of his sovereignty.

And its uses?

In the first volume of "Oeuvres Philosophiques," a hundred such are discovered. A fan is so charming, so confident, so suited to give countenance to a young girl, and to extricate her from embarrassment, that it cannot be too much exalted. It strays over cheeks, bosoms, hands, with an elegance which everywhere provokes admiration.

"Love uses a fan as an infant does a toy—makes it assume all sorts of

shapes; breaks it even, lets it fall a thousand times to the ground. . . .

"Is it a matter of indifference, this fallen fan? Such a fall is the result of reflection, of careful calculation, intended as a test of the ardour and celerity of the aspiring suitors. And the successful suitor, the favoured swain? Is it not he who discovers the greatest celerity in returning the fan to its charming owner, and, in so doing, imprints a secret but chaste kiss upon the fair hand that takes it, and is rewarded by a look ten thousand times more eloquent than speech?"

"And if, peradventure, by the spell of some magician, this little instrument in itself be endowed with speech! Aha! ma chère madame, what tales could it not unfold from the recesses of its fluted leaves! What whispers! What confessions! What assignations! What intrigues!"

"Pour une espagnole!" writes Charles Blanc, "toutes les intrigues de l'armour, tous les manoeuvres de la galanterie, sont cachées dans les plis de son even-

tail." And Disraeli, like Blanc, speaking of the Spaniards, says that a Spanish lady with her fan might assume the tactics of a troop of horse. Now she unfolds it with the slow pomp and conscious elegance of the bird of Juno, now she flutters it with all the languor of a listless beauty, now with all the liveliness of a vivacious one. Now in the midst of a very tornado, she closes it with a whirr, which makes you start. Magical instrument! In this country it speaks a number of languages, and gallantry requires no other mode to express its most subtle conceits, its most unreasonable demands, than this delicate motion!

To revert to Blanc: Nothing, he says, that a woman uses in the great art of pleasing can be considered simple. He then enumerates the various human elements that combine in the origin of a thing apparently so simple as a fan. No less than fifteen or twenty persons are employed in the making of this charming object, which passes through three series of operations. There is the work on the stick, in which are employed the cutter, the carver, the polisher, the gilder, the in-layer, the riveter and sometimes the jewel-setter, who inserts precious stones. Then comes the leaf, which requires designer, painter or printer, as the case may be. On spangled or embroidered fans, embroiderer or sempstress is employed. Next comes the folder or pleater. Finally, in the last touches, the tassels,

tufts and marabouts are added by the deft hand of a woman; and "when this formidable weapon of coquetry is completed, it is enclosed in a case, like a well-tempered blade in its sheath." So much for Blanc. Clever, is he not? Evidently Mr. Rhead thinks so, since he

quotes from him in his "History of the Fan," a luxurious work, with many plates in colour and monotone; an English book for which the Messrs. J. B. Lippincott Company are the American agents.

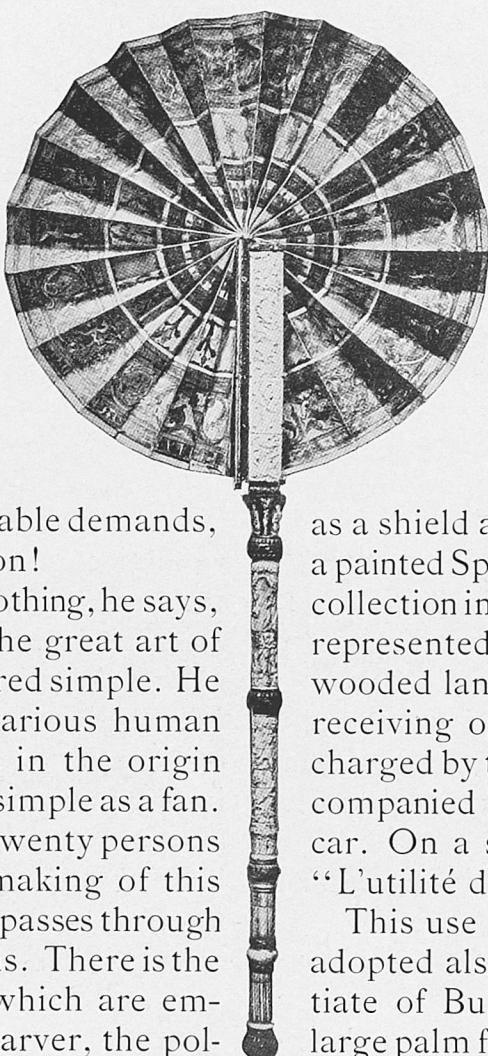
If the fan is efficacious as a weapon of offence in love's sieges, it is no less efficacious

as a shield against love's darts. On a painted Spanish fan in the Schreiber collection in the British Museum are represented three fair nymphs in a wooded landscape, one of whom is receiving on her fan an arrow discharged by the Love-God, who is accompanied by my lady Venus in her car. On a scroll is the inscription, "L'utilité des eventails."

This use of the fan as a shield is adopted also by the monastic novitiate of Burma, who employs his large palm fan, both as a shield from

the fierceness of the sun's rays, and as a screen from the sight of womankind, moving, in the latter instance, his fan from right to left, as occasion requires, which is whenever a woman happens to pass.

In Japan the fan was developed into an article of offensive and defensive use in actual warfare. The Japanese battle or war-fans are of two kinds—the flat,



The Flabellum of Tournus, IX Century

rigid screen (uchiwa, which is the earliest) and the folding (ogi). In both, iron is the material of which they are mainly composed. The flat war-fan is sometimes formed completely of iron and brass, is of considerable weight and is used by officers both for direction, offence and defence—as baton, weapon and shield. Sometimes it is circular in form and occasionally is inlaid with the more precious metals; more often, however, it resembles the pear or the gourd-shaped screen. The Japanese also have water fans (mizu uchiwa) for kitchen use. These date from the XVIII century. They are of bamboo

sequently applied being of a rich warm brown.

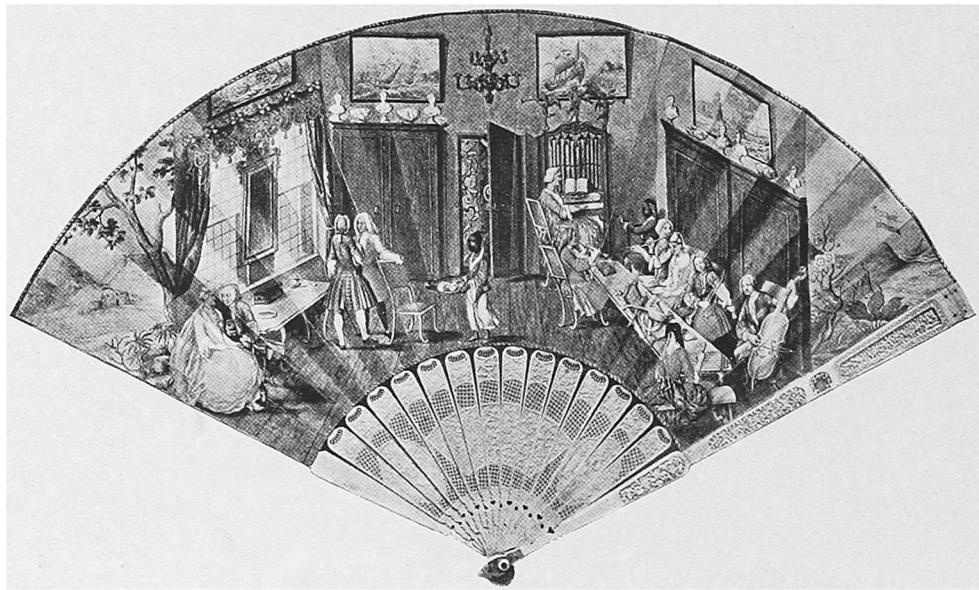
A beautiful story of the fan has come down from a remote period of China, yet, in spite of its age, still finds application in the speech of the people. It is the tale of a favourite of the Emperor Ch'êng Ti, of the Han dynasty,

B. C. 32, whose name was Pan, and who for sometime had been a confidante of his Majesty

and the queen of the imperial seraglio. Having persuaded herself that something more than an ordinary attachment of the hour existed between herself and the 'Son of Heaven', she yet found her influence on the wane, and



Wedding Fan, with Blanchard's Balloon, 1784, French



A Concert, Dutch, 1720-30. Given by the Duke of Coburg to Princess Victoria (afterwards Queen) in 1836

separated into segments, covered with stout paper and varnished or lightly lacquered so as to allow of the fan being dipped in water, thus securing extra coolness by evaporation. They are often decorated with figures and other subjects, the varnish sub-

being unable to conceal any longer her mortification, grief and despair, she forwarded to the Emperor a circular screen-fan, upon which were inscribed the following lines expressing the contrast between the summer of her reciprocated love and the autumn of her desertion:

O fair white silk, fresh from the weaver's loom,
Clear as the frost, bright as the winter snow—
See, friendship fashions out of thee a fan:
Round as the white moon shines in Heaven above;
At home, abroad, a close companion
thou;
Stirring at every move the grateful
gale,
And yet I fear, ah me! that autumn
chills
Cooling the dying summer's torrid
rage,
Will see thee laid neglected on the
shelf,
All thought of bygone days, bygone
like them.

And from this period, in China, a deserted wife has been called an autumn fan.

Since in China, from a very ancient date, each province had something distinctive about its fans, it is interesting to observe that even more rigid differences once existed in Italy.

The noble Venetian matron carried a tuft fan with a mirror in the centre garnished with pearls. The plumed fan is seen in the hands of the noble demoiselles of Milan, or married Genoese ladies, or the noble matron of Siena, the latter of whom, together with the ladies of Venice, Perugia, and other cities, also carried the

black-fan. The smaller fan with long thin handle, surmounted with five or seven feathers set symmetrically, was carried by the Parmese, Ferrarese, and Florentine ladies, and by the noble matrons of Genoa.

Milanese ladies carried a fan made

apparently of feathers, rigid and bound round in five sections. The married ladies of Naples and Bologna carried rigid screens designed in the form of a cartouche of the strap-back so usual in the XVI century Renaissance ornament. The later hand-screens seen in the engravings of Callot and others were obviously a development of this form.

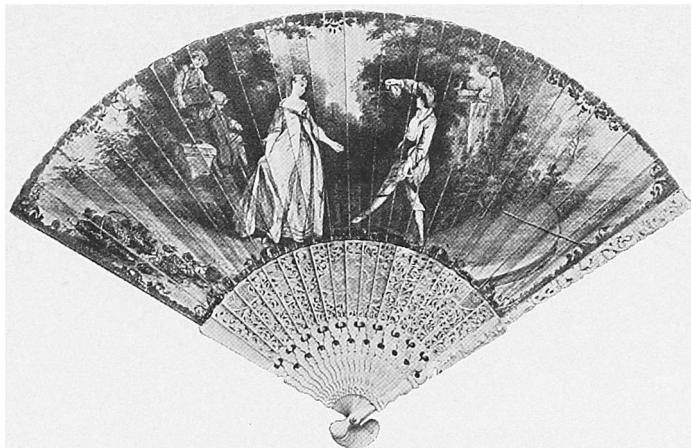
The Chinese story of the fan which I have related being essentially Oriental, what, I ask, could be more essentially Gallic than the story of the fan of Mademoiselle Desroches? The art of elaborate perforation of fans is essentially

Italian in its origin, but in the fan which has become associated with Mademoiselle Desroches, such a degree of elaboration is attained, that this example may be accepted as a type of a number of fans produced during the XVI and XVII centuries and later. And here is the story:

It was at a gathering of wits at Poitiers in 1579, that Etienne Pasquier, perceiving a flea on the neck of Mademoiselle Desroches, exclaimed that "la petite bestiole" deserved to be immortalised. Accordingly a collection of poems in Greek, Latin, French, Spanish and Italian was published in



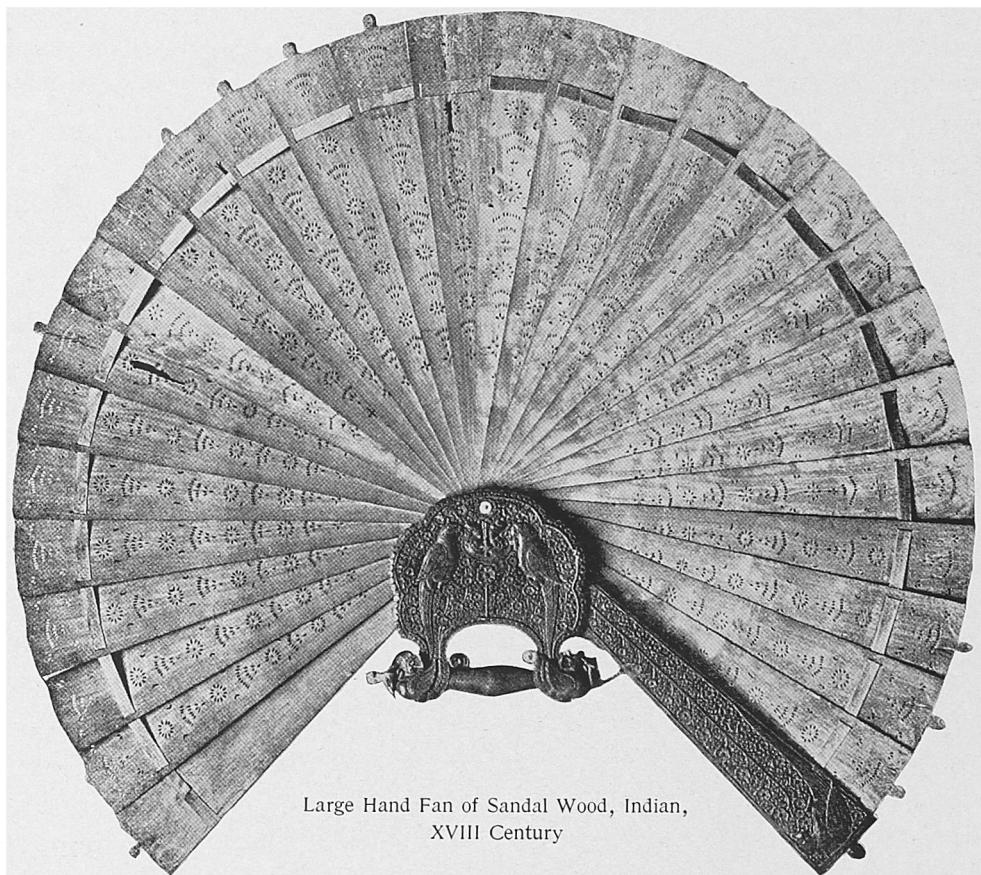
Hand Screen, Chinese



La Danse, after Lancret

Paris in 1582, under the title of *La Pulce de Mademoiselle Desroches*, the most felicitous of these plaisanteries being, according to *La Monnage*, from the pen of the lady herself. But there also was painted a fan to commemorate the event. It was once in the possession of the Pompadour, and is now in the Jubinal collection at Paris. It is

It was with the dawn of the XVIII century, that French pictorial art entered upon that era of *fêtes galantes* conversations galantes, and amusements champêtres, which, whatever its shortcomings, was peculiarly French and native to the soil. The pernicious influence of the Italian decadence was about to be shaken off. Watteau was



of paper, elaborately cut to imitate lace. This leaf—the stick has long since perished—was exhibited at the great exhibition of fans at South Kensington in 1870. It bears five finely painted miniatures representing the senses. In the center picture “Touch” a young man places his finger on the bosom of a sleeping lady, the spot on the neck presumably representing “la petite bestiole”—the flea of *Mademoiselle Desroches*!

sixteen years old and just commencing those labours which resulted in the practical regeneration of French painting. He dominated the art of the XVIII century and sums up in himself that spirit of the joyousness of life, that careless impulsive frivolity, which is the characteristic note of the age.

Surely it was an exceptionally gay and light-hearted time, in painting at any rate, and this the fans after Boucher, Lancret and Fragonard show. Strephon

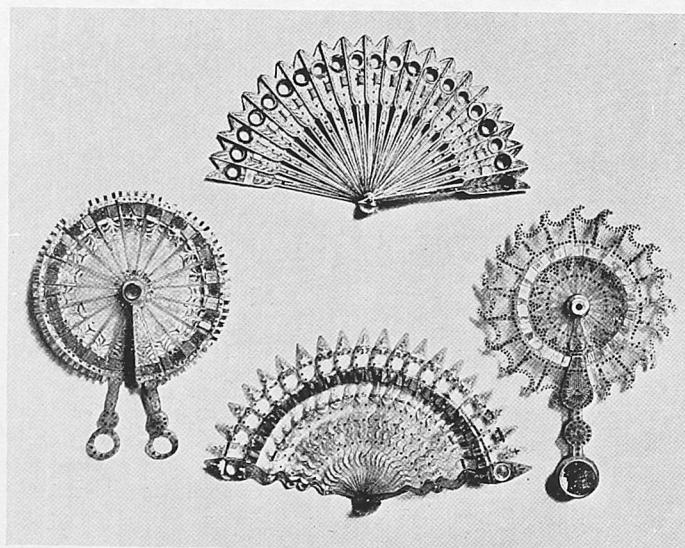
sat at the foot of Phyllis, warbling soft nothings to the accompaniment of the lute. Dan Cupid, who was everywhere in evidence, took it for granted that his presence was always à propos and never troubled his curly head as to whether his decorative surroundings were in the best possible taste. The shepherdess in her flowered skirt rubbed shoulders or attempted to do so with the lady in her crinoline.

It also was during the XVIII century that the vogue of fans became general in England, and fan-painting became a most lucrative profession. The sculptor Nollekins tells us that when his wife was a girl, her father's intimate friend Goupy was considered the most eminent of the fan-painters.

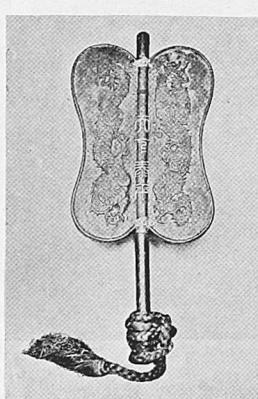
Fan painting

was then so fashionable that the family of Athenian Stuart (so-called on account of his exquisite studies of Athens) placed him as a pupil with Goupy, conceiving that by so doing they had made the lad's fortune. In point of fact Stuart origi-

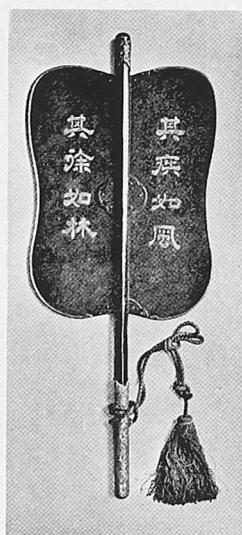
nally gained his livelihood by painting fans.



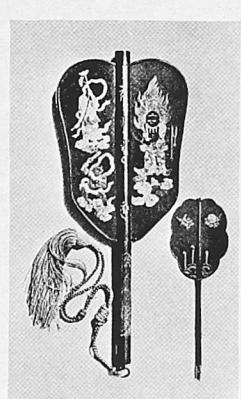
Lorgnette Fans



Japanese War Fans.



“Gumbai Uchiwa”



The practice of engraving fans, begun tentatively in Italy by Agostine Carracci in the latter half of the XVI century, and in France by Callot somewhat later, did not become general until the close of the century that followed.

The topical fan, having reference to royal and distinguished personages or recording public events, was entirely the product of the XVIII century, and

died with it. During this period the engraved fan became a curious purveyor of history, a kind of running commentary

on affairs of the hour. It was the fan of the people, the poor relation of the more aristocratic painted fan. Thus the great

“Descente en Angle-

terre, 1803” (which never took place, but was confidently expected) forms the subject of a number of fans. Napoleon, to the accompaniment of Fame's trumpet and the rataplan of the drum-major, shows his troops the Channel, and

points to St. Paul's, London, and the Tower (French version). The Channel is tunnelled (in imagination), troops pour through with ammunition, cannon and other paraphernalia of war. Above, a fleet of vessels on the sea, and an army of balloons in the air, invade England, which defends itself by means of captive kites, sky-rockets, and the guns booming from the fortifications at Dover.

As to the origin of the fan, the word is derived from the Latin *vannus*, the Roman instrument for winnowing grain. This winnowing-fan, held sacred by all the peoples of the ancient world, together with the fire-fan (bellows), also a sacred instrument, and used by the priestesses of Isis to fan the flame of their altars—these must be counted amongst the earliest of the ancient and prolific fan-family.

These two fans, the winnowing-fan and the fire-fan, minister to the most pressing of man's necessities, his daily bread, and to his chief mental necessity, the attainment of the bread of life; the fire-fan keeping alive the former sacred to the great goddess, who is the mother of all things, mistress of the elements, giver of the golden grain, which, when ripened, is separated from the chaff by the winnowing-fan;

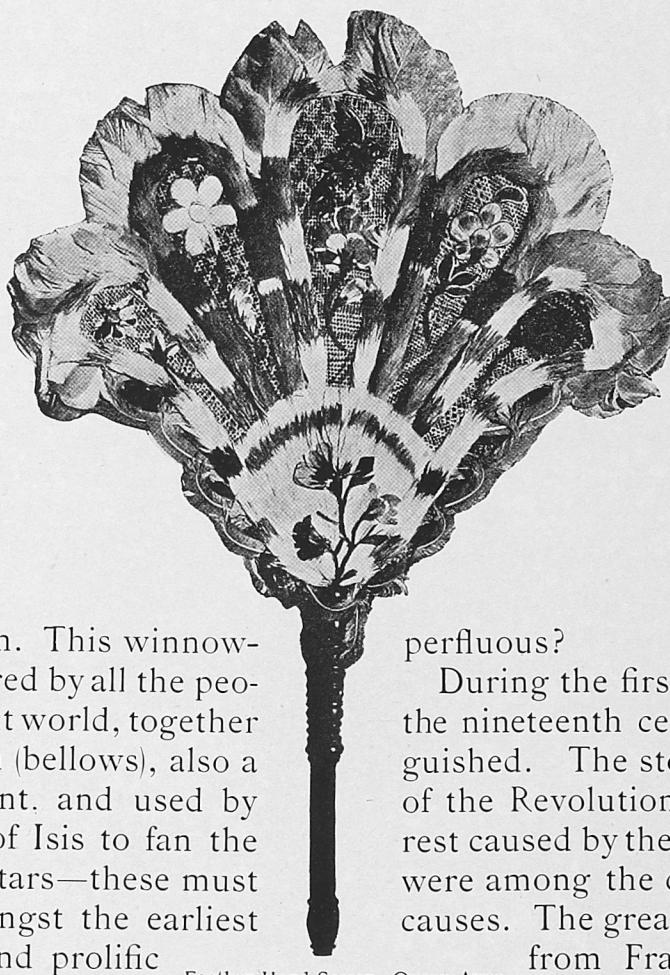
the one instrument, therefore, being the complement and counterpart of the other.

When we consider the modern uses of the fan, these origins become clearly recognizable. For is not miladi's fan an implement with which she first fires her suitors' hearts and then winnows the favoured ones from the chaff; or—remembering that the tall, single ostrich plume fan was probably in the first instance a flywhisk—with which she whisks the too accustomed lover into the limbo of the superfluous?

During the first three decades of the nineteenth century the fan languished. The storm and upheaval of the Revolution, the general unrest caused by the Napoleonic wars, were among the chief contributing causes. The great families had fled from France, taking their fans with them. For the

first fifteen years of the century, there is little to record except a difference of proportion.

Shortly after the first quarter of the century, however, the fan determined the course of history, for in 1827 it was the provocative cause of the conquest of Algeria by the French. A blow on the head of the French consul from the plumed fan of Hussein Dey resulted in an apology being demanded and



refused, with the consequent declaration of war.

It was, however, the circumstance of a grand ball given at the Tuileries in 1829 that occasioned the renaissance of the fan. Madame la Duchesse de Berri was organising a Louis XV costume quadrille—fans of the period were required to complete the tout ensemble, and none were available. At length one of the guests recollected an old parfumeur in the Rue Caumartin named Vanier, who had collected ancient fans. These were conveyed to the palace, where, in the quadrille, they created extraordinary interest—were eagerly purchased, and from this time onward in the most exclusive circles, in spite of the fickleness of that jade, Fashion, the fan has retained its hold upon the affections of the fair.

It is a curious fact that, while we fail to trace with any measure of certainty any single instance, during the XVII and XVIII centuries, of an artist of the first calibre touching the fan—exquisite as the fans of these period were—during the first half of the century that succeeded, the fan may boast

of such names as Horace Vernet, Ingres, Isabey, and others only a little less distinguished. These, however, only represent a welcome oasis in the dreary desert of mediocrity—the limpid springs at which from time to time the lover of the fan may pause for a few moments to refresh himself.

Among the ultra-moderns, who have produced fans, are Charles Conder and Frank Brangwyn. It is impossible at the present stage of a career having in the natural order of things so much before it, and in the face of such superabundant energy, to form any definite idea of the ultimate outcome of Mr. Brangwyn's art; of his present accomplishment, his etched work, which ranks amongst the most remarkable produced during the recent periods, seems likely to earn for him the most enduring fame. If we might conceive etched or engraved fans becoming again popular in the XX, as they were in the XVIII century, it might be an interesting speculation as to how Mr. Brangwyn would treat an etched fan. No doubt the result would be a success.

